

MILPITAS MIDTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN

Summary of Existing Conditions

Prepared for
City of Milpitas



April 27, 2000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Milpitas Midtown planning area represents an exciting opportunity to reinvigorate the commercial and industrial core of Milpitas and bring it into the life of the City. Clearly, Midtown is at a watershed point in its development; the area is strategically within the larger "Silicon Valley" region, an area that has experienced tremendous growth and prosperity in the past several decades. Midtown is highly accessible; it is set between Interstates 880 and 680; it is traversed by two Union Pacific Railroad lines; it includes two major east-west arterials; and will be served by the Tasman East Light Rail Line (LRT), as well as a heavy commuter rail (i.e., Caltrain type service and ultimately BART) connection between Union City BART and San Jose. Recent development activity in Midtown, including over 1,200 units of new housing and reinvestment in the Great Mall to expand entertainment activities, begin to point to new directions for the 1,093-acre Milpitas Midtown area.

This report represents the culmination of the first phase of work in the development of a Specific Plan for the Milpitas Midtown area. It sets forth a compilation of the existing conditions with respect to land use; market trends; community design; access and circulation; infrastructure and drainage; and cultural resources. In addition to compiling the existing conditions in the planning area, the first phase of work included a significant public outreach component that is documented in a separate report. The existing conditions will be used to assess the potential for redevelopment in the Midtown Planning area together with the results of the community outreach meetings. These reports will form the basis for drafting goals and planning alternatives for Midtown.

Land Use

Property Ownership. Property ownership patterns in the Milpitas Midtown area are complex. Overall, there are approximately 466 parcels owned by 362 individuals, agencies and associations. Overall patterns include small lot patterns in the older portion of Main Street (between Weller and Curtis Avenue) to larger parcels south of Great Mall Parkway and Montague. Very large single ownerships include the County of Santa Clara Elmwood Rehabilitation Center, at 110 acres and the Great Mall Shopping Center, at 130 acres. Several public agencies own property in the area, including Santa Clara County (Elmwood Rehabilitation Center and other parcels), the City of Milpitas (Senior Center, Fire Station and others), the City and County of San Francisco (Hetch-Hetchy Right-of-Way), and the Santa Clara Valley Water District (creek channels). In total, public agencies own 162 acres within the planning area. In addition to these publicly owned properties, the Union Pacific Railroad owns approximately 150 acres throughout the study area. Most of this land, an estimated 110 acres, is used for automobile storage and transfer, and not direct railroad operations.

Existing Land Use. As a whole, the dominant uses in the planning area include service commercial uses, such as automobile services, building materials and storage yards and facilities (18%); retail development (17%); and research and development/industrial uses (13%). Collectively these commercial uses account for almost half (48%) of the planning area. The planning area has a large complement of public and semi-public uses (11%), including publicly owned facilities, such as the

Elmwood Rehabilitation Center, but also privately owned public service uses such as churches, the YMCA, and child-care businesses. Transportation related land uses, including railroad rights-of-way, railroad sidings and streets, account for another 210 acres or about 20% of the Midtown area. A large percentage of the planning area, approximately 87 acres or 8% of the area, includes undeveloped and/or vacant lands¹. Uses such as residential (single family homes, apartments and mobile home park) (6%), industrial (auto wrecking and truck yards) (5%) and professional office (medical and professional)(1%) account for a relatively small share of the planning area.

Undeveloped and Underutilized Parcels. There are approximately 87 acres of undeveloped or vacant (i.e., land with vacant buildings) land within the planning area, and another estimated 165 acres of land which could be considered underutilized. In total, this equates to 252 acres of land or 30% of the usable land area of Midtown (excluding street and railroad rights of way and spurs).

Undeveloped Land. Undeveloped parcels range from relatively small sites along Main Street (i.e., 15,000 square feet) to the 45 acres of land surrounding the Elmwood Center.

Underutilized Land. Underutilized sites were identified as those sites that have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Vacant Buildings
- Low Levels of Site Investment (i.e., open storage yards)
- Low Development Intensity
- Surrounded by Higher Value Uses

Land Use Conclusions and Recommendations

The Midtown Milpitas area, consisting of 1,093 acres of urban land, is strategically located within a prosperous and growing residential and job center. It is estimated that at least 250 acres, or 30% of the developable area of Midtown, is comprised of undeveloped or underutilized parcels which can be redeveloped with new uses that can transform the area to a more vital mixed use district. Land use and zoning regulations and design guidelines should be developed to accommodate a mixed use development and higher density building types.

In recent years, there has been a strong trend toward higher density residential development in the area. These developments, including Images and Reflections at the northern end of the planning area, the Monte Vista Apartments, Parc Metropolitan, the Crossings at Montague, bring new life and interest into the planning area. Additional residential development should be encouraged in the Midtown area to develop a critical mass of housing that would support businesses, reinforce the use of planned transit facilities, and address local and regional housing needs.

¹ Undeveloped lands have never been developed; vacant land includes areas that may have been developed, but are currently vacant or supporting a transitional use, such as storage.

Figure 1 Aerial View of Midtown Milpitas

While there are several parcels that are well-located and readily developable, others are constrained by various factors. In the Main Street area, property ownership patterns consist of smaller lots. Redevelopment of underutilized properties in this area would be greatly assisted by assembling parcels to create larger development sites. Two of the larger opportunity sites in Midtown, the vacant land adjacent to the Elmwood Rehabilitation Center, and land used for car storage within the rail yards, are constrained by difficult access. The Specific Plan should investigate options, such as pursuing an additional railroad grade crossing, to address circulation constraints. Other constraints in the area, particularly for new housing, include sources of noise, such as the railroad and major arterial streets, and externalities associated with commercial and industrial businesses. Creative approaches to design, such as live-work lofts in predominantly industrial districts should be investigated. Amenities that improve the quality of life in residential districts, such as parks, open space and neighborhood services, such as a grocery store, should be planned along with new residential development.

Market Overview

Retail. With large regional centers such as the Great Mall and McCarthy Ranch in the area, Milpitas serves as a major net attractor of retail sales from residents outside the area. Across most merchandise categories, Milpitas realizes strong performance. Significant strength is evident in the apparel and accessory and eating and drinking categories where retail sales are at least 200 percent or greater than its estimated population-based retail demand. On the other hand, Milpitas shows some net leakage in the food and liquor and auto dealers and supply categories.

The Milpitas Midtown area is located in an intensely competitive shopping environment. Any additional retail in Midtown must follow significant residential development. For example, in order to attract an additional grocery store as desired in the southern portion of the planning area, it is estimated that, at a minimum, an additional 2,000 dwelling units must be developed within a 1.5 mile radius.

Hotel. The Milpitas Chamber of Commerce lists 18 hotels in the city. In all, the hotels have an approximate total of 2,445 rooms. The occupancy rates of these hotels varies greatly between weekdays and weekends. Hotels in Milpitas generally have occupancy rates between 90 and 100 percent during the work-week, and have much lower occupancy rates (between 30 and 70 percent) during the weekends. Overall, the occupancy rate for hotels in Milpitas is 82 percent. This is a high occupancy rate when compared to rates in other cities in the Mountain/Pacific area (PKF Consulting Trends January 2000). Milpitas has relatively few large conference and meeting facilities associated with hotels. The large hotels in Milpitas (200 rooms or more) have a total of 26,000 square feet of meeting space.

Residential. Milpitas Midtown is emerging as an important residential area. Over the past three years, development and approvals for 1,228 new units has given gravity to this area as a residential location. Considering the housing shortage in the region as a whole and the robust economic performance of the Bay Area, there is strong demand for higher density housing in Midtown Milpitas.

Office and Industrial. Historically, Milpitas has been considered a warehouse hub without a significant amount of office product. Considering office, R&D, industrial and warehouse space, Milpitas has a total of 19 million square feet of inventory. The city has a significant presence in the

Silicon Valley warehouse and R&D markets, and a smaller presence in the industrial market. In the office market, Milpitas is still a small player with just 2.6 percent of total inventory holdings in Silicon Valley.

Market Overview Conclusions and Recommendations

The economy of the Bay Area represents one of the strongest regional economies in the country. Employment growth in the past few years has generated significant demand for new housing. With median home prices in Santa Clara County ranging from a high of \$1,690,000 in Los Altos Hills to low of \$284,000 in Gilroy, Milpitas represents one of the more affordable alternatives in the county with median home prices at \$335,000. The housing shortage in the Bay Area, the location of Milpitas within Silicon Valley, and the more affordable housing alternatives within the city position Milpitas well for further residential development.

Because Midtown Milpitas is located in an intensely competitive retail environment, new retail development along Main Street will not likely occur unless fueled by new housing development. Clearly, the southern portion of the study area is under served with respect to supermarkets, and the current population in the area (est. 7,400 people) is not sufficient to support a market. In order to provide market support for a supermarket in this area, it is estimated that at a minimum an additional 2,000 housing units will be required.

The strong economy of Silicon Valley has driven up occupancy rates at hotels in Milpitas with many hotels being fully occupied during the work-week. Local hotels, however, lack large conference and meeting facilities, sending meeting planners to facilities in nearby San Jose or Fremont. With the healthy state of hotels in the area and the robust economy, there appears to be market support in Milpitas for a hotel with greater conference/meeting facilities.

Milpitas has a strong presence in the Silicon Valley R&D and warehouse markets, and a smaller presence in the industrial market. Meanwhile, the city has a limited presence in the office market. With the smaller land assemblies that are available in the Midtown area, however, these uses are not expected to be a major factor in the area.

Community Design

Districts. Midtown Milpitas includes a wide variety of land uses and building types, and cannot be characterized as being a singular, visually cohesive district. Instead several clearly discernable districts can be identified within the planning area.

Grain of Development. The 'grain' of development refers to the scale and relative size of buildings, parcels and roadways. In Midtown Milpitas, there is a tremendous variation in the grain of development ranging from finer scaled buildings and streets in the North Main Street area to the very coarse grained Great Mall area. The grain of development begins to point out areas that are more human or pedestrian in scale and can be further enhanced to a walkable district. Areas with a coarser grain will be primarily oriented to the automobile; however pedestrian linkages through these areas to key destinations are important design considerations.

Landmarks and Focal Points. There are several elements within Midtown Milpitas that can begin to contribute to a strong sense of identity that is uniquely Milpitas. These include several structures along Main Street, including the Milpitas Senior Center, Campbell's Corners, An-Jans, the DeVries

House, the Winsor Blacksmith Shop, and several Craftsman and Victorian era homes, some of which have been reused for commercial purposes. In addition to these buildings, the O'Toole Elms, which link Main and Abel Streets, are a remnant landscape feature that are a strong visual element in the area.

Views. There are several open views to the mountains east of Milpitas that are significant in providing a visual backdrop to the area and a strong sense of orientation as one travels within the urban fabric. The drama of views to the mountains can be heightened through landscaping along east-west streets that frame long-range views.

Gateways. There are numerous community gateways within the Midtown Area. These include entries at Calaveras Boulevard; Great Mall Parkway; Montague Expressway; and South Main Street. Enhancement of these areas through high-quality development and landscape treatment would greatly improve the overall image of the Midtown area and Milpitas as a whole.

Open Space and Linkages. Currently, there are no developed City or other open space areas located within the Midtown area. However, several off- and on-street trails are planned for the area, including the Penetencia Creek Trail, Berryessa Creek Trail, Wrigley Creek/Union Pacific Railroad Trail, the Hetch-Hetchy Trail, and the Yosemite Drive/East Curtis Avenue Trail. When developed, these "green threads" have the potential to become an important focus of activity as well as a visually appealing amenity in the Midtown planning area.

Streetscapes. The streetscape environment along Main Street, Abel Street, Great Mall Parkway and Calaveras Avenue is generally sparsely landscaped and tends to discourage pedestrian movement. In general, the existing street rights of way are ample to provide for significant enhancements to the streetscape environment.

Community Design Conclusions and Recommendations

The Midtown Area is an interesting part of Milpitas that can be enhanced through high-quality development that is oriented to the pedestrian and the emerging transit function of the area. The urban design framework for Midtown Milpitas should be structured around a system of green streets, trails and open spaces. Abel and Main Street as well as Great Mall Parkway appear to have adequate right of way to provide landscaping, wider sidewalks and bicycle accommodation as necessary to provide a more pedestrian friendly and amenable environment. Publicly accessible urban open spaces should punctuate new development areas, and be linked to the larger bicycle and pedestrian system. Urban design guidelines should be developed to guide the orientation of buildings to the street and to provide parking areas that do not degrade the pedestrian environment. Gateway areas should receive special attention in terms of both architecture and landscape standards. Landmarks, such as the Milpitas Senior Center, should be woven into the fabric of the community.

Circulation

Roadway System. The planning area is served by two interstate highways (I-880 and I-680), one state highway (Calaveras Boulevard SR 237), several regional arterials (Montague Expressway, Great Mall Parkway, and Main and Abel Streets) and several smaller local streets. Due to the parallel railroads which bisect Milpitas, east-west travel routes are limited.

With respect to operations, during the AM and/or PM peak hour many of the streets and highways experience severe congestion—within the study area, 12 freeway segments on I-880, I-680 and SR 237 and 11 intersections operate at unacceptable levels of service.

Transit System. Midtown Milpitas is currently a center of bus transit operations. A transfer center between the VTA and AC Transit systems occurs at Weller and Main Street. Some 14 fixed route and express bus lines converge at this location. In addition, there are paratransit services and shuttle services that serve the City of Milpitas. With the extension of the Tasman LRT line into the area, as well as the potential for heavy rail service (Clatiran and ultimately BART) on the Union Pacific corridor, Midtown will become a prominent regional transit hub.

Pedestrian System. Pedestrian facilities are comprised of sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian signals. Crosswalks and pedestrian signals are provided at all of the signalized study intersections. Gaps in the sidewalk system are located on the east side of Abel Street between Main Street (south of Great Mall Parkway) and Corning Avenue, the west side of Abel Street from Calaveras Boulevard to Weller Lane, the south side of Serra Way between Abel and Main Street, and the south side of Great Mall Parkway between McCandless Avenue and Montague Expressway.

Bicycle System. Bicycle facilities are comprised of bike paths (Class I), lanes (Class II), and routes (Class III). Bike paths are paved trails that are separated from roadways. Bike lanes are lanes on roadways designated for bicycle use by striping, pavement legends, and signs. Bike routes are roadways designated for bicycle use by signs only. There is a system of bike lanes and routes that serves the planning area. The City of Milpitas Bikeway Master Plan and the City of Milpitas Trails Master Plan proposes new bikeways, including some Class I facilities along creeks, as described below.

Proposed Trail System. The City of Milpitas City Council has adopted a Master Plan for an off street trail system. There are four different types of trails defined in the Milpitas Trails Master Plan: Regional Trails, City Trails, Neighborhood Trails, and On-Street Connectors. The Master Plan has proposed several City Trails to pass through the Midtown area of Milpitas.

Penitencia Creek Trail is a prominent trail that follows Penitencia Creek through Midtown. The *Wrigley Creek/Union Pacific Railroad Trail* is a north-south trail that begins at Montague Expressway and travels along the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. The *Berryessa Creek Trail* is a north-south trail that follows Berryessa Creek through Midtown. The *Hetch-Hetchy Trail* is a north-south trail that continues in a south-west direction north of Calaveras Boulevard and terminates into the Wrigley Creek/Union Pacific Railroad Trail north of Yosemite Drive. An east-west On-Street Connector, that connects *Penitencia Creek Trail*, *Berryessa Creek Trail*, and *Wrigley Creek/Union Pacific Railroad Trail* is located on Yosemite Drive with a connection to Curtis Avenue.

Circulation Conclusions and Recommendations

The Midtown area is located in an area which experiences significant peak hour congestion. Under current conditions, unacceptable operating conditions occur at 11 gateway or internal intersections, and 12 freeway segments during the AM and/or PM hour. Congestion on I-880 causes through traffic to be diverted to key roadways in Midtown, including Main and Abel Streets. Looking at the street network within Midtown, there are limited east-west corridors which causes circuitous travel patterns. There are also discontinuous or substandard pedestrian facilities on some streets.

Looking to the future, Midtown Milpitas is assuming a role as an emerging transit hub. The Tasman East LRT expansion is under construction, and will include two stops in Midtown; one at the Great Mall/Main Street and one at Montague Expressway. There is also a proposed heavy commuter rail system (initially a Caltrain type system and eventually BART) proposed along the Union Pacific corridor. Preliminary plans for this corridor include two stations in Midtown; a station at Montague, and another at North Main Street.

Both the circulation system and the land use plan for Midtown Milpitas should reinforce the emerging role of the area as a transit hub. Clear and attractive connections for bicycles and pedestrians should be developed to the transit stations and surrounding new development should be designed to create an attractive station environment and to maximize use of alternative modes. An east west connection through the planning area should be explored. This connection may come initially in the form of a pedestrian and bicycle crossing.

Infrastructure and Drainage

Potable Water. The City of Milpitas owns and operates the municipal water system that provides water to the Midtown area. Portions of the water are supplied by the San Francisco Water Department (SFWD), and by the Santa Clara Valley Water Department (SCVWD) which is distributed primarily to non-residential customers. An update to the City's Water Master Plan was completed in 1994. According to this study, the overall water supply needs of the City could be met with the current agreements with SFWD and SCVWD.

Storm Drainage. The storm drainage system is comprised of a system of underground pipes which drain into creeks, and which ultimately flow to the Bay. Creeks within the planning area include Berryessa, Lower Penetencia and Wrigley-Ford Creeks, which are all owned and maintained by the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD). Portions of the planning area are within the 100-year floodplain as designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The floodplain is a result of overflows from Berryessa and Lower Penetencia Creeks. The City's storm drainage master plan is currently being updated; this document will recommend improvements to mitigate flooding and drainage problems in the planning area.

Sewage and Wastewater. The wastewater collection system in the planning area is owned and maintained by the City of Milpitas. Wastewater collected in the area is pumped from the Milpitas Sewer Pump Station to the regional San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant. A master plan for the wastewater system was also conducted in 1994. This study concluded that the current City contract with the City of San Jose for wastewater treatment at the plant is adequate capacity for projected development within the city through the year 2012. The plan also identified two major improvements necessary to accommodate growth in the city through this period. These improvements include: a 'relief sewer' for overflow and a parallel forcemain downstream of the pump station to meet peak wet weather flow requirements.

Recycled Water. Recycled water is available in Milpitas through the South Bay Water Recycling Program. An existing transmission line bisects the Midtown area in the vicinity of Elmwood and Curtis Avenue.

Infrastructure and Drainage Conclusions and Recommendations

Utility infrastructure in the Midtown Area is generally adequate to accommodate new development. The City has prepared utility master plans that identify the improvements that are required. As plans are developed for the Midtown area, impacts on utility infrastructure will be evaluated.

Cultural Resources

On the basis of an archival search the following cultural resources were identified in the Midtown area:

Archaeological Resources. Archaeological resources include material remains indicating the presence of Native Americans. Material remains include artifacts, which were made, used, or altered by people, such as lithic (stone) material, groundstone, discarded artifacts, and human remains. The literature review found that the Midtown Area contains five recorded Native American cultural resources (CA-SCL-38, -126, 677, -678 and a portion of C-1414) (NWIC 2000). According to the Northwest Information Center, thirty archaeological investigations have been conducted in the Midtown Area, covering approximately 75% of the site.

The literature review also found that Native American archaeological sites in this portion of Santa Clara County tend to be situated through the alluvial flats, with the highest density existing along existing and extinct water courses. The Midtown Area is situated on alluvial flats that have been known to contain “aboriginal artifacts and skeletal remains” (NWIC 2000). Several archaeological sites in the Midtown Area have been discovered under 3 feet of alluvium. Given these considerations, it is likely there are unknown archaeological resources buried beneath the present day Midtown Area (NWIC 2000).

Historic Resources. Historical resources generally include historic structures (residential, commercial, civic, and transportation-related) as well as sub-surface deposits relating to historic occupation of an area. The older buildings in the Midtown Area include a few remaining commercial buildings (i.e. stores/shops, restaurant, blacksmith shop, saloon), a few civic structures (i.e. a church and former school), and several former and current residences. The architectural style of these structures include a wide range of styles dating from 1885 to 1930, including Queen Anne, Italianate, Mission, Craftsman Bungalow, Prairie, and False-Front Commercial. These buildings exist as small pockets, set amid a late 20th century urban landscape, primarily clustered along North and South Main Street.

The City of Milpitas maintains a Register of Cultural Resources within the city limits (City of Milpitas, 1988). The Register identifies six historic cultural resources or sites of former historic resources in the Midtown Area (see Figure 26). These resources are described below.

- **Milpitas Grammar School/Senior Center (1916); 160 North Main Street.** This significant building is an outstanding example of a new-classical public building. This structure is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- **DeVries/Smith Home (1915); 163 North Main Street.** The DeVries/Smith Home is a locally rare example of a Prairie style building and home to Dr. Renselaer J. Smith, the second doctor to set up practice in Milpitas. This structure served as both Dr. Smith’s residence and medical office.

- ***Winsor Blacksmith Shop (ca 1920); 112 North Main Street.*** The Winsor Blacksmith Shop is a locally rare surviving early false-front commercial building. The Winsor family settled in Milpitas in 1863. The blacksmith shop was built by brothers Tom and George Winsor.
- ***St. John's Church Site and Chapel (ca 1870); 279 North Main Street.*** This is the site of the oldest church in Milpitas originally constructed in 1870. The oldest remaining resources on this site include a small Mission style chapel (ca. 1910) and two large palm trees that were planted in 1901.
- ***Cambell's Corners (a.k.a. Smith's corners) (1908); 167 South Main Street.*** Cambell's Corner is an historic structure located at an historic intersection (Alviso Road and South Main Street). This corner has been the site of a saloon since Milpitas was first established as a community in the mid-1800s.
- ***Milpitas Hotel Site (1857) and "Fat Boy" Restaurant Site (1924); 147 South Main Street.*** Site of the first hotel built in Milpitas, which burned down in 1910. The "Fat Boy" Restaurant was later built on this site and was part of one of the first fast-order restaurant chains in California. A dentist's office is now located on the site.

In 1990 the City of Milpitas completed an Historic Sites Survey that inventoried 42 structures 50 years old or older in the City of Milpitas (City of Milpitas 1990). Following the survey, the City of Milpitas completed and adopted the Conceptual Historic Resources Master Plan in 1993 which identified one additional historic site within the Midtown Area as a "prime" candidate for preservation:

- ***Caudillo House (1899); 280 South Main Street.*** The Caudillo House is a locally rare example of a Queen Anne style building.

In addition, a portion of the Elmwood site as well as a vacant lot facing Abel Street, contains a row of Elm trees that once lined the entrance to a large mansion. Although the mansion is now gone, the row of Elm trees still exist and are considered locally significant (pers. comm. Beth Wyman, Santa Clara County Historical Heritage Commission, 12/15/99). A recent assessment of the trees by an arborist revealed that they were in a severe state of decline. Nine trees were recommended for immediate removal, and the remaining trees were recommended for removal over the next five years.

Cultural Resources Conclusions and Recommendations

The Midtown area has a several known archaeological sites, and it is likely that there are others. There is one building on the National Register of Historic Places (the Milpitas Grammar School) and several locally recognized structures in the Main Street area. Given the likelihood of archaeological resources in the area, new development, particularly on undisturbed sites will need to be monitored for previously unknown archaeological resource remains.

Adaptive reuse of locally identified historic buildings along Main Street can provide a unique character to the Main Street area. In addition, there is the opportunity to provide educational and interpretive elements in the planning area describing Milpitas' history.